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FOLLOW-UP TO THE ECOSOC RESOLUTION RELATING TO THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

Note by the Executive Secretary

- This note provides information on follow-up to ECOSOC resolution 1998/46 which inter alia provided guidance on how to optimize the potential of regional commissions both as regional outposts of the UN and as the regional expression of the United Nations occupying a niche in the institutional landscape of their respective geographical areas. The follow-up action, which is of an ongoing and dynamic nature, relates to participation in management coordination mechanisms, UN system Regional Inter-Agency Meetings; and cooperation with global UN entities.

- The Commission may wish to decide that information contained in this report be transmitted to ECOSOC.

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BACKGROUND

1. In his report to the 1998 session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on regional cooperation (E/1998/65), the Secretary-General emphasized the dual role of the regional commissions: on the one hand "as regional outposts of the United Nations, they carry out certain functions so as to contribute to the Organization's global work programme", and, "on the other hand, as the regional expressions of the United Nations, they occupy a niche in the institutional landscape of their respective geographical areas." He then discussed how to optimize the potential of the commissions.

2. Subsequently, ECOSOC, in its resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998 acknowledged the role played by the regional commissions in norm-setting, analysis and dissemination as well as operational activities. It also recognized that the commissions provide an important forum for articulating regional perspectives on global issues and for building consensus within their respective region.

3. ECOSOC recommended that the activities of the regional commissions should be more effectively linked with the overall activities of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors. To this end, for example, the Executive Secretaries should be actively involved in the Secretary-General's Executive Committees on Economic and Social Affairs (EC-ESA) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). Along the same lines, ECOSOC encouraged joint exercises between the commissions and other secretariat entities such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The need for the funds and programmes to utilize the capacity of the commissions was also stressed and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was asked to consult more closely with the commissions during the programming stages of its regional activities. The reactivation of the UNDP/regional commissions task force was also called for.

4. The ECOSOC resolution also emphasized the importance of cooperation with relevant non UN regional bodies. ECE's cooperation with these partners, which is reported on in documents E/ECE/1368 and E/ECE/1371, is accorded a high priority not only because such entities can provide a strong political support to the implementation of instruments developed within ECE but also because this partnership can best address the global and regional challenges confronting Europe today.

5. Finally, ECOSOC agreed with the Secretary-General's proposal to hold yearly inter-agency meetings in each region, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General or the Executive Secretaries, with a view to improving coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the United

Nations system in that region. The outcome of these meetings would be reported to the Council through the intergovernmental bodies of the commissions as appropriate.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION

6. Since the ECOSOC resolution, a number of actions have taken place which respond to the guidance it provided.

Participation in management coordination mechanisms

7. Regional commissions are better involved in the UN global management:

- The Executive Secretaries participate in the meetings of the EC-ESA which take place 4-6 times a year. These meetings address issues of common concern and coordination. For example, the group agreed to prepare analyses and policy recommendations on the international financial architecture, debt management, financing for development and the social dimension of macro-economic policy. A first paper has been published under the title "Towards a new international financial architecture".

- The regional commissions are represented through their coordinator in the UNDG.

- The Executive Secretaries are now invited to the weekly meetings of the Senior Management Group which is chaired by the Secretary-General and consists of Heads of UN entities. Because of the teleconferencing facilities in Geneva, the ECE Executive Secretary often represents his colleagues.

United Nations System Regional Inter-agency Meetings

8. The first Regional Inter-agency Coordination Meeting was held for the region covered by ECE, in Geneva on 9 February 1999. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. It brought together representatives from the European Offices of some 20 United Nations specialized agencies, Funds and Programmes.

9. The overall purpose of the meeting was to conduct a review of cooperation mechanisms and arrangements existing at the regional level and to exchange views on areas for further cooperation, in order to improve the collective response by the UN system to the needs of the region.

10. The participants discussed existing mechanisms of coordination as well as the priority issues which need collective cooperation. It was agreed that dialogue at the regional level needed to be further developed in order for all organizations to collectively improve their common understanding of the region's needs, trends and challenges which would lead to a joint assessment of the economic and social situation. This is turn could lead to shared goals among the organizations and the identification of a coherent set of actions to be taken by them at the regional level to support those goals.

11. The meeting also underlined the rationale for developing regional consultations and activities. Indeed, there are problems which are inherently regional in nature and cannot be solved at country level, for example air pollution and border crossing. In addition, the regional approach, apart from providing a necessary modality to address regional concerns and problems, also brings to light, through exchange of experiences in regional fora, issues of common interest to several countries as well as disparities between groups of countries within the same region. This exchange, which can cover both policy issues and operational programmes, can contribute to the forging of intraregional linkages and promote a better integrated cohesion of the region as a whole.

12. The relationship between regional programmes and country programmes was also discussed. It was generally felt that both country programmes and regional programmes can benefit from and provide useful inputs to one another. For example, the normative work developed at the regional level (common or harmonized standards and guidelines) could be taken up and promoted in country level programmes. Consideration, at the regional level, of cross-sectoral issues and interdependencies between sectors could also contribute to adjustments of existing national programmes or development of new programmes in response to the collective assessment of the region's needs, trends and challenges. Conversely, successful country programmes can be discussed at the regional level with a view to replicating them in other countries or other parts of the region, with adjustment as necessary. The outcome of consultations in the framework of the resident coordinators system and UNDAF-related mechanisms could also provide useful inputs to the consultations at the regional level.

13. Regarding funding of activities, most agencies attending the meeting expressed their need for more resources. They stressed the proven advantage of the UN system in supporting intercountry activities such as harmonization of infrastructure networks, convergence of rules and regulations, border crossing, etc. The experience of some subregional groupings shows that financial institutions are more ready to provide the necessary funding for projects when they have been developed on the basis of intercountry cooperation.

14. The meeting further agreed that:

- a common assessment of the regional situation should be carried out in the forthcoming months, with the ECE acting as the facilitator and in close collaboration with a "core" group of agencies, funds and programmes whose activities focus on social and economic issues;

- this common assessment should lead to further defining of priority areas for cooperative efforts in the region. At this stage, some priority areas for interagency cooperation have already emerged among which: (i) reduction of disparities between and within countries of the region; (ii) policy and institutional capacity building in the transition economies; (iii) decreased vulnerability of the latter to external shocks; (iv) furthering the realization of human rights; (v) follow-up to global conferences; (vi) relations with civil society; and (vii) resource mobilization;

- this experience and its subsequent development (possible future cooperative actions) will be reviewed next year at a meeting to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General.

Cooperation with global UN entities

15. Joint activities and cooperation with other secretariat entities were already reported to the fifty-third session (document E/ECE/1362). The paragraphs below highlight developments in 1998.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

16. In the field of economic analysis, ECE has developed close cooperation with the Macroeconomic and Development Policies Branch of UNCTAD's Globalization and Development Strategies Division. UNCTAD draws on ECE for material concerning the European and especially the transition economies, and ECE relies on UNCTAD for data concerning the global context for the ECE economies. Both organizations benefit, like many others, from their participation in the LINK project which, for many years, has been gathering together the senior economists from governments and institutions to discuss economic forecasts and policy issues. In 1998, the ECE and UNCTAD secretariats produced a joint analysis of the Russian crisis for UNCTAD's Trade and Development Board, and starting in 1999 ECE will draft the section on transition economies for UNCTAD's annual Trade and Development Report. The Executive Secretaries participated in the Trade and Development Board's dialogue with the Second Committee, through video conferencing, on the impact of the Asian crisis in their respective regions.

17. In the area of trade facilitation the ECE secretariat has over the year confirmed and strengthened its close working relationship with UNCTAD. As requested at the Commission's fifty-third session, ECE Recommendation No.4 on National Trade Facilitation Organs has been redrafted and submitted to CEFACT for approval. The redrafted version, which was the result of a joint ECE/UNCTAD effort, ensures that there is no inconsistent approaches by the two organizations in this field. Further, ECE has actively participated in UNCTAD's conference on "Partners for Development" held in Lyons (France), in November 1998 as well as in various seminars and workshops. In addition, ECE has made a substantive contribution to the UNCTAD "Train for Trade" programme discussing ways and means for small and medium-sized companies to be included in the electronic commerce community.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

18. Efforts to improve cooperation and coordination with UNDP are ongoing. In September 1998, the Executive Secretaries met with the heads of the Regional Bureaux in New York in order to discuss new terms of reference for the joint Task Force. A strategic compact for collaboration between UNDP and the regional commissions is currently being finalized. In addition to calling for the reactivation of the Task Force, this outlines mechanisms of collaboration for exchange of information band programming at the national, regional and interregional levels.

19. The Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States of UNDP and the ECE, in collaboration with the Harvard University Center for International Development, organized on 8 December 1998, in New York, a dialogue on policy responses to the Russian crisis and recent developments in Latin America, and on reform of the global financial infrastructure. Follow-up activities have been envisaged in the form of country level follow up round tables.

20. Under the auspices of the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project, two projects funded by the UNDP/Global Environment Facility (US$ 2 to 3 million each) have been under implementation on the development in the energy efficiency demonstration zones of Gabrovo (Bulgaria) and Vladimir (Russian Federation). They are now being implemented through the UNDP offices in Moscow and Sofia. ECE has also provided technical assistance to the UNDP project on sustainable forestry management and reduction of adverse environmental impacts by using wood and wood residue resources for the production of heat power in Belarus.

Habitat

21. ECE work in the field of human settlements is structured according to the recommendations of the Habitat II Conference. The ECE Committee on Human

Settlements recognizes that upgrading living conditions of people in central and eastern Europe is one of the most formidable challenges in the ECE region on the eve of the new millennium. The governance in spatial planning, housing development and privatization was selected as an umbrella topic for human settlements activities in line with recommendations of the Habitat II Conference to strengthen local economies and democratic representative government by making public administration more transparent and accountable. The work of the Meeting of Officials on Land Administration to assist countries in transition to establish a system of real property administration, property rights legislation and related institutional framework is one of the key areas of the follow-up activities to the Conference where the ECE and Habitat cooperate and share experience.

22. In 1998, the ECE secretariat conducted a survey of the follow-up to the Habitat II Conference and implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The ECE is coordinating its activities with Habitat on participation in the round table discussion on partnerships for action towards sustainable consumption during the High Level Segment at the forthcoming seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

23. As requested at the Commission's fifty-third session, regular meetings are held between the ECE Environment and Human Settlements Division and the Regional Office for Europe of UNEP. The latest of these annual meetings was held in November 1998. At these meetings items for possible cooperation and measures to avoid overlap in efforts are assessed.

24. The Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) to the ECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution which was signed by Ministers at the Environment for Europe Conference in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998 is being used as a major input to the ongoing UNEP negotiations on a global agreement on the same item. ECE experts have taken part in global awareness raising activities organized by UNEP.

25. UNEP has shown interest in the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, adopted and signed at the Aarhus Conference, in order to initiate activities on a global level. In January 1999 this cooperation was discussed in Geneva with the Executive Director of UNEP and subsequently the Director of the ENHS Division made a presentation of the Convention at the High-level segment of the session of UNEP's Governing Council in Nairobi in February 1999.

26. ECE and UNEP are cooperating in the implementation of a project on environmental impact assessment in the CIS countries. The project will

contribute to the application of the provisions in the ECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and support accession to the Convention by CIS countries. In addition the project will create a basis for interstate cooperation on the EIA Convention in the subregion.

27. ECE is developing jointly with UNEP a strategy for compliance with the ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The project is also intended to draft guidelines on public participation in river basin management within the context of the Convention. The project report will be submitted to a Ministerial "World Water Forum" Conference to be held back to back with the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention in The Hague, Netherlands, in March 2000. The documentation to be produced by the project is, in addition, expected to give guidance to the interim implementation of the forthcoming Protocol to the Convention, on water and health, which will be presented for adoption and signature to the June 1999 London Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health.

28. Cooperation with UNEP has also started on the ECE Environmental Performance Review programme. UNEP provided a staff member for the EPRs on Ukraine and Croatia.

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

29. The Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP), operating under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, is implemented in cooperation with WMO. This scheme of cooperation has been in operation since the inception of the programme in the 1970s and contributes to the high scientific and technical level of the activities.

World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO)

30. The Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution has established a Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution together with the European Centre for Environment and Health of WHO/EURO. The Task Force will prepare information as a contribution to facilitate decisions on possible further regulatory action on air pollution under the Convention.

31. The Committee on Environmental Policy is cooperating with WHO/EURO through a jointly established European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), in the preparations for a third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health which will take place in London from 16 to 18 June 1999. The Conference is expected to adopt a protocol on water-related diseases to the

ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, a charter on transport, environment and health and a ministerial declaration. The Committee on Environmental Policy will analyse the Conference's outcome in September 1999 and cooperate/participate in possible joint follow-up activities in close cooperation with WHO/EURO.

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

32. ECE, under the auspices of the Working Party on International Contract Practices in Industry, held a Forum on the "Enforcement and Protection of Intellectual Property Rights in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS", on 26-27 October 1998, with the participation of WIPO as well as the WTO and EU. Over 250 persons participated. This Forum endorsed the need for follow-up in this area. If the CTIED approves the need for such follow-up action, ECE will request the active cooperation of WIPO.

Cooperation with the World Trade Organization (WTO)

33. Cooperation with WTO reached a new level of intensity in 1998/99 under the auspices of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (CTIED). Firstly, in the trade facilitation area, ECE worked very closely with the WTO Market Access Division and contributed to all aspects of WTO's initiative regarding the facilitation of international trade. Secondly, the CTIED's work in standards and technical harmonization was presented to the WTO Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and to the TBT Symposium. Thirdly, the WTO secretariat (together with WIPO) cooperated with the CTIED in organizing the Investment Forum on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights in the Transition Economies. Finally, ECE participated in the 1998 WTO Ministerial Council in the United States of America.